

Teaching**English** training videos



Pronunciation: stress and intonation

Teaching English rhythm

1 Before you watch

This programme is about **stress**, **rhythm** and **intonation**.

Stress is about which sounds we emphasise in words and sentences. For example in the word 'banana' the stress is on the second syllable, in the word 'orange' the stress is on the first syllable. In sentences, we usually stress the most important, 'content' words.

Rhythm is about how we use a combination of stressed and unstressed words in sentences. Sentences have strong beats (the stressed words) and weak beats (the unstressed words).

Intonation is the way the **pitch** of a speaker's voice goes up or down as they speak. We use intonation to help get our message across.

Look at some of the problems learners have with English stress and intonation:

Stress

Identifying the main words that are stressed.

Intonation

Recognising if the intonation is going up or down or staying flat, because the patterns are very different in my own language.

Rhythm

Concentrating on saying the strong beats, and not worrying too much about the weaker parts.

Work with a partner if you can. Are any of these things difficult for you? Why? Would you add any other problems? Make notes in the box.

2 Watch

Now watch Programme 4. The Thai teachers mention some of these problems when they talk about their students. Match the things they say to the speaker.



Pathumporn



Montakarn



Supote



Sumalee

- A** *'I would focus on the sentence stress, you need to hear the primary stress, the rest is not important.'*
- B** *'You have to focus on the content words, you don't have to say every word.'*
- C** *'The difficult thing is intonation because Thai and English are very different.'*

3 Watch again

The programme is in three sections – **intonation**, **rhythm** and **stress patterns**. In each section there are *two* ideas to help students. Tick (✓) the ideas given in each section. One answer is done for you.

Intonation

- A Visually mark patterns by raising eyebrows when it goes up, or asking them to raise their heads.
- B Click your fingers to emphasise a **stress beat**.
- C Use arrows over the words on the board to mark rises and falls.

Rhythm

- A Ask students to repeat only the words which are stressed.
- B Use arrows over the words on the board to mark rises and falls.
- C Say numbers in a **rhythm**, then introduce words between them without changing the rhythm.

Stress

- A Use songs to help them develop **intonation** patterns.
- B **Backchain** a pattern of numbers, stressing one of the numbers more.
- C Mark **stress** clearly on the board to give them a visual record to keep.

4 Analysis and reflection

Choosing the right activities for your students

Different activities help with different stress and intonation difficulties for students. Look at the things students find difficult and choose the activity that will help.

Recognising intonation patterns

'We have rising intonation, we have falling intonation, we have rising and falling intonation . . . '

- A Ask students to raise their heads if the **intonation** rises.
- B Click your fingers to emphasise a **stress beat**.
- C **Backchain** sentences to show where the stress is.

Getting used to the alternation of weaker and stronger beats

'To emphasise the rhythm of English, you have to emphasise the alternation of weaker and stronger beats.'

- A Use songs to help them develop **intonation** patterns.
- B Click your fingers to emphasise **stress beats**.
- C Ask students to hum the **intonation** pattern without words.

Giving students a way to remember intonation patterns

'It's important that they have a visual representation of intonation.'

- A Ask students to put up their hand on the main **stress** in a sentence.
- B On the board you can put different colour arrows for rises and falls.
- C Click your fingers to emphasise a **stress beat**.

Planning an activity to help your students practise

- Choose a short listening text you are going to use with your students to help them focus on **stress**, **rhythm** and **intonation**. The listening text could be anything on a cassette, CD or DVD – a dialogue, a narrative or a story – anything you think will be useful for your students.
- Find the tapescript (or write it if there isn't one). Listen and mark which words are stressed.
- Say the text to yourself, first copying the model, then only say the stressed words to get an idea of the rhythm. Say it again, clicking your fingers on the main beats.
- Practise again, but putting the weaker forms back in between the main stresses.
- Listen again and draw a line that represents the intonation pattern (the high or low pitch and the rises and falls) across each sentence.
- Now that you are confident with the **stress** and **intonation** in the listening text, think about the techniques you saw in the programme. Which ones could you use with your students? Make a list in the box below.

- Try some of the techniques you listed above with your students. Afterwards, come back to your list and answer these questions:

Were they successful? Why/Why not?

What did the students find most useful? Why?

What would you do differently next time?

5 Suggested classroom activity

Rhythm

Ask students how many words they hear in a sentence that they hear in a listening activity or that you read out. This practises recognising word boundaries and increases awareness of main stresses and weak forms.

Intonation

One of the best ways to show students the difference between **intonation** rising and falling is by using lists. Use flashcards of food to elicit a list of food you are going to buy in a market:

'I'm going to market to buy, some oranges, some bananas, a pineapple and some apples.'

Exaggerate the rises on everything except the last thing, where you can exaggerate the fall. Play the game 'I'm going to market' with the students. They imagine one thing they will buy.

First student: 'I'm going to market to buy some eggs.'

Second student: 'I'm going to market to buy some eggs and some biscuits.'

Third student: 'I'm going to market to buy some eggs, some biscuits and a cake.'

Each student adds to the list practising the rising intonation for each thing on the list until the last thing, when the intonation falls. This is a memory game, which gets difficult as the number of things on the list grows. Encourage students to help each other if they can't remember, or put them in smaller groups when you are sure they can copy the intonation.